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## The Frontiers of Soviet Culture: Reaching the Limits?

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Since the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress in February 1986, cultural *perestroika* (restructuring) has consisted of an attempt on the part of the liberal intelligentsia to redefine the boundaries of the permissible in creative and intellectual work.<sup>1</sup> Its leading representatives have included Elem Klimov and Vadim Abdrashitov in film, Evgenii Evtushenko and Andrei Voznesenskii in literature, Vitalii Korotich and Egor Iakovlev in journalism, Sergei Zalygin and Grigorii Baklanov in literary journals, and Kiril Lavrov and Mikhail Shatrov in theatre. While prominent figures in television are more difficult to identify (with the exception of Vladimir Pozner), the broadcasting evidence of *perestroika* would certainly include the youth program "View," "Spotlight on *Perestroika*," "Position," and the numerous telebridges between the Soviet Union and Western countries.

In its broadest possible outlines, the cultural platform of the *gorbachevtsy* has included the encouragement of a broader spectrum of opinions, a defense of the individual's right to express those opinions and a willingness to address a wider array of social problems than had previously been permitted.

*Glasnost'* (plain-speaking), the catch-word under which many of the cultural reforms have been carried out, symbolizes a very different undertaking from that of *iskrennost'* (sincerity), the initial catch-word of the early Khrushchev Thaw years. First used by Vladimir Pomerantsev only nine months after Stalin's death,<sup>2</sup> *iskrennost'* signalled an opportunity for the liberal intelligentsia to step away from the public sham of Stalinist rhetoric and to explore instead the introspective side of the individual psyche. *Iskrennost'* represented a speaking from the heart, and its most eloquent cultural expression was lyric poetry.

*Glasnost'*, by contrast, has represented an opportunity for the liberal intelligentsia to step away from the personal reticence required of them under Brezhnev. It has signalled a chance to speak out publicly about corruption, historical dis-

tortions and a myriad of other issues. At its very basis, *glasnost'* is a speaking from the mind, and its primary cultural expression is the document: new publicistic prose, documentary film, drama *à clef*, and investigative journalism intended both to expose existing shortcomings and to galvanize popular support for social reform.

The cultural totem chosen to symbolize this effort to "revolutionize" the stagnant society has been, not surprisingly, Lenin himself: visionary, headstrong, unafraid of the opposition. From Shatrov's play *The Brest Peace* (written in 1962; published in *Novyi mir*, IV, 1987), with its strong associative links between Lenin and Gorbachev, to journalistic discussions of the merits of the NEP period, to the republication of authors unavailable since the twenties, the Soviet public has been encouraged to view this most recent change-of-power as a return to a purer revolutionary consciousness — in short, as a form of neo-Leninism.

The wide-ranging cultural reforms undertaken since Gorbachev's ascension to power in March 1985 continue today. At the same time, however, they provide a classic demonstration of Marxist dialectics at work: every revolution carries in it the seeds of its own counter-revolution. The reform of culture — liberal *perestroika*, the overhauling of cultural administration, the reorganization of artistic unions — has specific limits. Counter-reformation takes energy once those limits are reached. Three of the several tendencies we shall examine here are the emergence of conflicting *perestroikas*, retrenchment in cultural administration and the growing favoritism in the new union leadership.

### Multiple and Conflicting *Perestroikas*

Since the ouster of Boris El'tsin it has been increasingly difficult to ignore other emergent strains of cultural *perestroika* that, nurtured in the environment of *glasnost'*,

1 See Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov, "The Outposts of Official Art: Recharting Soviet Cultural History," *Framework*, 34 (1987): 59-106.

2 Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrennosti v literature," *Novyi mir*, XII, 1953.



have taken on an existence of their own quite different from, or even hostile to the agenda of the liberal intelligentsia. These other forms of cultural expression have become so assertive in the past several months that the original model of *perestroika*, directed by the *gorbachevtsy* and described briefly above, now impedes our vision of the current cultural reform process in all its diverse and contradictory tendencies.

One of the most evident trends resulting from Gorbachev's call for *perestroika* is the explosion in youth culture: rock music, street theatre, and the appearance of punks, hippies, *metallisty* (heavy-metal music fans), and motorcycle gangs on the streets of major Soviet cities. While greater tolerance and artistic documentation of such phenomena are very much in keeping with the spirit of the *gorbachevtsy* — witness Juris Podnieks' documentary film *Is It Easy To Be Young?* (1986), Rashid Nugmanov's *Ya-Ha-Ha* (1987) and E. Kokusev's *You Just Have To Draw the Bowstring* (1987) — the youth culture's own forms of cultural self-expression (heavy-metal music, spray-painting, and outrageous regalia) are hardly in keeping with that spirit. Emboldened by the increased official patience with and journalistic interest in their sub-culture, the youth has begun to enact its own *perestroika*: theirs is a seizure not of the Unions, but of the streets; their audience consists not of interested spectators, but of alarmed citizens, parents and militiamen, unwilling witnesses who inevitably associate this "asocial behavior" with the greater leniency permitted under Gorbachev. What began as a side-effect of the older elite's cultural *perestroika* has become a restructuring of the youth's own popular-culture values, life-style and leisure-time activities.

Even within the realm of elite culture, the liberal intelligentsia no longer holds a monopoly on the reform process. Artists of the experimental avant-garde, who have long occupied a marginal place to the left of the liberal establishment, have begun to explore outlets for creative expression and the distribution of their work undreamt of during the Brezhnev years. Arrangements for the Western purchase and exhibition of works by alternative artists Il'ia Kabakov, Erik Bulatov and others are now routinely conveyed to official art salons by telex. The phenomenon of home-based film-making, or "parallel cinema," by such young artists as Igor' and Oleg Aleinikov flourishes. The unofficial literary journal *Epsilon-Salon* co-exists alongside the new official journal *Rodnik*, which has already published verses by unofficial poet Tat'iana Shcherbina and by rock musician Boris Grebenshchikov, and plans in 1988 to include works by unofficial writers Viktor Erofeev, Vladimir Sorokin and Dmitrii Prigov.

The status of the experimental avant-garde has changed considerably since the period 1981-85, when the unofficial Leningrad poetry circle, "Club-81," could exist only with the acquiescence (and, some would maintain, the participation) of the local security forces. So, too, has their status changed from the days in 1986, when the horizons of literary acceptability for Prigov, an absurdist writer and Conceptualist artist, were limited to an unsigned brief appearance on the pages of the

journal *Teatr* (IV, 1986) or a mention in an extraordinary article by the literary critic Mikhail Epshtein.<sup>3</sup>

The avant-garde has begun to take the initiative in placing not only its own works, but also those of émigré, neglected or outcast writers. While the liberal establishment worried over the appearance in *Novyi mir* of Iosif Brodskii's verses (XII, 1987) and Vladimir Nabokov's *Nikolai Gogol* (IV, 1987) as well as the projected publication in 1988 of George Orwell's 1984, the unofficial *Epsilon-Salon* had already printed epigraphs from Brodskii. *Rodnik* published Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* (starting in IX, 1987) and has scheduled Orwell's *Animal Farm* for 1988. While the Union of Artists debates the fate of émigré artists, the independent artists' group "Hermitage" held two exhibits of émigré works in September and October 1987. While official cinema critics mull over the extent to which Andrei Tarkovskii should be reincorporated into the history of Soviet cinema, the unofficial cinema journal *Cine-fantom* has published the screenplay for his last film, *Sacrifice* (1986).

If the urban youth and the experimental artists are engaged in their own acts of cultural re-definition, so too is another, much larger group, loosely referred to in Soviet society as the *russisty* (russophiles), or Russian nationalists. Outstanding representatives of the russophile movement include writers Valentin Rasputin and Viktor Astaf'ev, literary scholars Vadim Kozhinov and Petr Palievskii, painter Il'ia Glazunov, sculptor N.I. Rozov and architects Viktor Vinogradov and Oleg Zhurin. Its principal periodical outlets are the journals *Nash sovremennik*, *Moskva*, *Molodaia gvardiia* and the newspaper *Literaturnaia Rossiia*. While its most liberal figure may be Zalygin, editor of the journal *Novyi mir*, its most conservative expression is surely represented by the organization Pamiat' ("Memory"), known for its monarchist, Russian Orthodox, and (though Pamiat' members deny the charge) anti-Semitic tendencies.

To limit a discussion of russophile thought to Pamiat', however, is both to discredit the movement's more valuable cultural contributions as well as to underestimate its appeal and influence as a broad-based celebration of all things Russian. This position inevitably includes a categorical rejection of both Western and Soviet multinational cultures, along with modernism in general.

While it might appear at first glance that the liberal leaders of cultural reform have much in common with the goals of both the youth culture and the avant-garde, their very espousal of diversity is what divides them; their defence of the individual is what individuates them. "Pluralism" as a positive term may allow for a range of opinions on the pages of *Ogonek*;<sup>4</sup> "pluralism" as a negative term precludes that same range, whether on the pages of *Molodaia gvardiia*<sup>5</sup> or in speeches by Egor Ligachev, Party Secretary in charge of ideology, warning Soviet teachers of "political and ideological pluralism."<sup>6</sup>

The price that the liberals have paid for their advocacy of *mnogooobrazie* (diversity) is a strong united front *vis-à-vis* the conservative russophiles. Absorbed with the issues of Stalinism, émigré culture and the unfinished business of the

3 Epshtein, "Pokolenie nashedshee sebja. O molodoi poezii 80-kh godov," *Voprosy literatury*, V, 1986.

4 See, for example, letters defending Stalin and the purges in *Ogonek*, nn. 33, 44, 48, and 49, 1987.

5 Mikhail Ustinov, "V otvete za vremia," *Molodaia gvardiia*, IX, 1987: 219-87.

6 *Uchitel' skaia gazeta*, August 27, 1987.

sixties and seventies, the liberal elite has had no time for contemporary experiment, either youthful or artistic. The youth, in its enthusiasm for the newly-tolerated popular culture, has no patience for the artistic refinement of either the elite or the counter-elite. The experimental avant-garde, involved in its own self-referential search, is uninterested in the social concerns of either the liberal reformers or the turbulent street youth.

Instead, it is the russophiles who offer the only cohesive (if not coherent) philosophy, based on a return to an idealized, authoritarian past, freed from the "bankrupt" schemes of both Westerners and the ethnic minorities, both industry and collectivization, both Brezhnev and Gorbachev. As a holistic world-view with the capacity to unite a wide spectrum of social groups ranging from the Academy of Sciences to the *narod* (people), russophilia is appealing both in its sweeping solution (a return to Russia's past) and in its explanation of current social problems (everything that prevents a return to Russia's past).

To push the point further still, these are the new dissenters from Gorbachev's reform program, whether they belong to the "loyal opposition" at *Molodaia gvardiia* (the contemporary analogue to *Novyi mir* in the 1960s), or to the "disloyal opposition" in *Pamiat'*. Much more than such "New Left" figures as Boris Kagarlitskii or even editors of underground journals such as Sergei Grigoriant and Lev Timofeev, the ultra-rightist *Pamiat'* activists are a fundamental challenge to the existing *status quo*. Gorbachev's assertion, "I do not think that there is anyone who would now consider the idea that it is possible to manage without the assistance of the Party,"<sup>7</sup> was publicly called into question by members of the *Pamiat'* conference held in the autumn of 1987 at Leningrad State University, where one participant maintained that "nothing can be changed in our country without a renunciation of Marxism as a profoundly Zionist doctrine."<sup>8</sup>

Our purpose is not to warn of the existence of a *Pamiat'* counter-conspiracy to the imagined Judeo-Masonic plot for world domination. It is rather to suggest that for every fifty-five-year-old *gorbachevets* emboldened to act upon the current general secretary's cultural mandate, there is a fifty-five-year-old *russist* who has endured the years of Brezhnev stagnation with the expectation that having bided his time and played by the existing rules, he would legitimately inherit power. The ensuing frustration is compounded by the perception, largely accurate, that the growing social disorders in many ways replicate Western tendencies so abhorrent to the russophile philosophy: urban youth problems, minority unrest and the "deterioration" of cultural standards.

## Re-Reading the "Literature of *Glasnost*"

If the present moment in Soviet cultural politics is characterized by greater caution, it is tempting to recall the "heady" days of 1985-87, when the cultural front was dominated by the so-called liberals. At that time, three literary works in particular had enormous resonance among the intelligentsia and

in the Soviet press: Rasputin's *The Fire* (*Nash sovremennik*, VII, 1985), Astaf'ev's *Sad Detective Story* (*Oktiabr'*, I, 1986), and Chingiz Aitmatov's *The Executioner's Block* (*Novyi mir*, VI, VIII-IX, 1986).

During the late summer of 1986, each of these three works was regarded as a revolutionary event, as literature's response to the Party's socio-political call for *perestroika*. This synchronic view was based on the links between the abrupt change in political rhetoric (*glasnost'*), on the one hand, and the unexpected dominance of a new genre (*novaia publiistsika*, or new publicistic writing), on the other. *Novaia publiistsika* was seen as the literary analogue to *glasnost'*: both advocated plain-speaking as the way to expose failures, pointedly asked "what is to be done?" and sought answers among the populace-at-large rather than the centralized state agencies.

By early 1987, the three works began to be discussed diachronically, that is, as a historical series. This enabled readers to trace socio-political failures to the loss of *pochvennost'* (connection to the soil). In *The Fire*, this was depicted as the deracination of the countryside, the enforced severance of natural ties, and the resulting ethical disorientation. In *Sad Detective Story* the absence of moral values was situated in a society that was alcohol-ridden, corrupted and now innately criminal. In *The Executioner's Block* the social destruction of personal values and the use of drugs were indicative of a nationwide loss of *dukhovnost'* (spirituality). The shift from a purely synchronic reading revealed an important feature in these works that was initially undervalued: whereas the implied readers of all three are city-residents, the victim-subjects are, for the most part, displaced country-folk, collective farm workers, or "boom town" squatters. In the peculiar politics of literary texts, the pleasure of reading became a kind of acknowledgement of guilt — the city-dwellers' penance in front of the represented and abused *narod*.

The current reading of these three works by the liberal Moscow intelligentsia is the most ominous. *The Fire* is now read back through the prism of Rasputin's recent ultra-nationalistic interview (*Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 1, 1988) and article (*Nash sovremennik*, I, 1988); *Sad Detective Story*, back through the racism and xenophobia of Astaf'ev's "Gudgeon Fishing in Georgia" (*Nash sovremennik*, V, 1986),<sup>9</sup> as well as his correspondence with historian Natan Edelman; and *The Executioner's Block* through the anti-progressive and anti-technological views of Aitmatov's *The Day Lasts Longer Than A Hundred Years* (*Novyi mir*, XI, 1980). Even Aitmatov's heavy-handed use of Christ motifs and Christian symbolism is seen as an attempt to co-opt the spiritual searching of the oppositional intelligentsia and to integrate it into a much larger state agenda, which many citizens fear is not so incompatible with *Pamiat'*'s call for a revived and purified *pravoslavie* (Russian Orthodoxy).

If we Western scholars have made one major error in our assessment of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, it is this: we have tended to perceive all cultural changes taking place since

7 *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, July 17, 1987.

8 *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, November 24, 1987. It would, however, be a mistake to cast *Pamiat'* simply as an anti-Marxist movement. Judging at least from public documents, such as the *Vozzvanie* of December 8, 1987 and the *Obrashchenie* of February 1, 1988, as well as from our personal conversations with the *Pamiat' aktiv*, the organization perceives itself to be the caretakers of Russian culture (including Russian Orthodoxy), which long predates the Party's triumph of 1917, and which has been badly served by "cosmopolitans," technocrats, and other "dark forces" that have gained control of the Party.

9 *Syntaksis*, no. 17, 1987: 80-87.

March 1985 as traceable in an unmediated fashion to his leadership, without taking into account the formidable and at times antagonistic counterweight of the russophile movement.

This error has led us to throw into one political basket both russophile works, such as *The Fire*, and liberal reformist works, such as Anatolii Rybakov's anti-Stalinist novel *Children of the Arbat* (*Druzhba narodov*, IV-VI, 1987). That these two works belong to distinct historical moments has long been clear; what has been less clear is their allegiance to different political camps. The first is a nationalist alarm (*nabat*), rallying readers to salvage Russia; the second is a bell of summons (*vechevoi kolokol*), calling citizens to bear witness to an era deliberately neglected since the early 1960s. It is this crucial difference that gets overlooked when all works critical of the *status quo* get lumped under the specious and misleading category "the literature of *glasnost*."

## Art as Product vs. Art as Process

Following closely upon the halcyon period of 1986-87, when the Soviet public was inundated with forbidden, neglected, or forgotten works at a rate unprecedented even in the Thaw period, several major editorial positions passed into the hands of reform-minded liberals.

In the midst of all this upheaval, it is easy to lose sight of two factors, now becoming increasingly significant in cultural politics: first, a number of influential journals remained strongholds of conservative values, undergoing virtually no editorial changes from 1986 to the present; second, the publication of a controversial work in a specific journal in and of itself signifies nothing about changes in that journal.

Such is the case with the publication of Nabokov's *The Defense* in the conservative journal *Moskva* (XII, 1986). Asked to explain a move so out of keeping with both the journal's profile and that of the editor-in-chief, Mikhail Alekseev himself replied that "it was time to return Nabokov to our readers," adding that "he was after all a Russian." And Brodskii? "Brodskii is not a poet ... also, he is not Russian."<sup>10</sup>

What, then, is the essential difference between Alekseev's publication of Nabokov in *Moskva* and Viacheslav Gorbachev's excoriation of "nabokovshchina" in *Molodaia gvardiia*?<sup>11</sup> Different political camps? Different degrees of commitment to Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika*? Neither. The essential difference is between tactics and strategy within the same political grouping, where the primary concern is to weather the *gorbachevskaia perestroika* until such time as the *russistskaia perestroika*, already underway, will have more favorable conditions for success.

Unlike the youth culture and the experimental artists, who are battling for turf that is of little interest to anyone but themselves, the *gorbachevtsy* and the *russisty* are engaged in a struggle for control of key positions on editorial boards, in artistic unions and in scholarly institutions. While the Western press has focused on the products of this struggle — Nabokov, Rybakov, and, most recently, Vasilii Grossman — much more

important gains have been made by conservatives in affecting the artistic process: the appointment of Feliks Kuznetsov as Director of the Gor'kii Institute of World Literature; the appointment of Dmitrii Urnov as editor-in-chief of the journal *Voprosy literatury*; the rejection of applications by prose-writer Tat'iana Tolstaia, poet Marina Kudimova and critic Vladimir Novikov to the Writers' Union; the attempt — albeit unsuccessful for the time being — to appoint Kozhinov as head of the pivotal Theory Sector of the Gor'kii Institute.

While the conservatives continue to consolidate their control over the cultural process, the liberal editors have begun to implement a new round of sensational publications in the struggle for subscribers in 1988. As in 1987, the January issues of several journals included some especially provoking texts: Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and Grossman's *Life and Fate* (*Oktiabr'*, I-V), both delayed for a quarter of a century; Shatrov's new play *Forward... Forward... Forward* (*Znamia*). In part, this is an attempt to expand circulation and readership. Equally important, it is an attempt to revive the energy of the publishing process, which went into a semi-dormant stage in the last quarter of 1987.

An examination of the titles slated for serial publication in 1988 reveals four essential categories of works, three of which extend from 1986-87, while the fourth marks a new (and potentially dangerous) departure. The first category consists of works by Soviet writers that have been blockaded — Pasternak, Grossman, Vladimir Vysotskii's *Novel About Girls* (*Neva*); the second, of works by contemporary Soviet (Russian and multinational) authors that have been recently completed: Vladimir Orlov's *The Apothecary* and Aitmatov's "nôvyi perestroinyi roman," *The Madonna in the Snow*<sup>12</sup> in *Novyi mir*; Anatolii Pristavkin's *Woman from Riazan* in *Znamia*; Otar Chiladze's *The March Cat* in *Druzhba narodov*.

The third category consists of new publications by émigré authors, most notably Nabokov's *Lolita* in *Inostrannaia literatura*. The publication of several poems by Brodskii last year seems to have opened the way for a more extensive rehabilitation, if that term can be used for a poet who never had the chance to publish anything in the Soviet Union prior to his enforced emigration in 1972.<sup>13</sup> Now that the *zapret* (ban) on publishing living émigré authors has been lifted slightly, a new pool of manuscripts has become available to Soviet journals. For the time being, however, that pool may be restricted to those émigrés who, like Brodskii, did not publish literary texts in the Soviet Union prior to emigration. At the top of this list is Sasha Sokolov, whose novels — *A School for Fools* (1976), *Between Dog and Wolf* (1980) and *Palisandria* (1985) — have had an avid readership among the liberal intelligentsia for more than a decade.

The fourth category is the most problematic: the tradition of anti-utopian fiction, which in the Soviet Union has been consistently labeled "anti-socialist." The dysutopian tradition is most notably represented in Soviet literature by Evgenii Zamiatin's *We*. *Znamia* has announced that it will publish *We* in 1988, while other journals plan to publish Huxley's *Brave*

10 Sally Laird, "Soviet Literature — What Has Changed?," *Index on Censorship*, vol. XVI, no. 7, 1987: 10.

11 *Molodaia gvardiia*, VII, 1987: 235-42.

12 A pejorative pun playing alternately on the meanings "new novel about restructuring" or "newly restructured novel," but implying that Aitmatov is merely engaged in what is traditionally dismissed as *kon' iunktura*, that is, opportunistic hackwork.

13 Despite Brodskii's acrimonious letters to Oleg Chukhontsev (poetry editor at *Novyi mir*), other journals plan to publish poems by Brodskii this year — *Neva* (III), *Iunost'* (V), *Druzhba narodov* — while *Ogonek* intends to publish some of his articles, and *Inostrannaia literatura* has commissioned Viktor Erofeev to write a lengthy article on Brodskii's poetry.

*New World (Inostrannaia literatura)*, Orwell's 1984 (*Novyi mir*) and *Animal Farm (Rodnik)*. In a similar vein, *Neva* has announced that it will publish Kafka's *The Castle*, while *Inostrannaia literatura* will publish Koestler's *Darkness At Noon*. The road from Koestler to Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle* or *Cancer Ward* is not difficult to foresee.

As impressive as this new list of forthcoming titles appears at first glance, one feature should not be overlooked: the reduced number of suppressed "blockbuster" publications in the last months of 1987. This fact suggests that the editorial "pipeline" might be drying up (although the continued homelessness of Isai Kuznetsov's novel *The Staircase*, for example, would indicate otherwise). It also lends weight to the notion that the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution provided a fortuitous moment for consolidation of conservative forces.

Yet these two explanations account for only part of the story. Whether or not the supply of suppressed works has been depleted, the liberal reformers have chosen to focus their efforts on this source of manuscripts rather than on works by younger, lesser known, or new writers. Simply put, the decision to publish Grossman, Rybakov and Vladimir Dudintsev is simultaneously a decision not to publish less established, contemporary writers. If, therefore, the pipeline is drying up, it is doing so in part with the participation of liberal editors.<sup>14</sup>

As for the seventieth anniversary, it is not a causal factor in the slowing down of the reform process, but simply an opportunity for the conservative forces to consolidate power at a faster rate than would otherwise be possible. That this consolidation was already underway in November is not only evident in the political sphere — witness El'tsin's ouster after his October 21 speech at the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the CPSU and Gorbachev's call for "revolutionary restraint" in his speech of November 2. It is also acknowledged directly by political commentator Fedor Burlatskii in his one-act "*pièce-à-clef*," *First Lessons (One Year Later)* and by *Moskovskie novosti* editor Egor Iakovlev in his Vienna press conference of November 20, 1987:

At first all the opportunities which were opened up in regard to democratization were taken up by the most progressive and liberal forces in our society. The more conservative elements were at a loss, so to speak, and in disarray. But now these conservative elements have understood that democracy can also be used by them.<sup>15</sup>

## Collective Work, Cultural Controls and the Emigré Tradition

As we have emphasized elsewhere,<sup>16</sup> the Union of Cinematographers and the newly formed Union of Theatrical Workers have undergone the most turbulent re-organizations, have occasioned the greatest promise of artistic breakthroughs, and have been in the forefront of the struggle to curtail bureaucratic, administrative interference in the crea-

tive process. Though the so-called "radicalism" of these two unions caught both Western observers and Soviet "cultural workers" equally by surprise, there are several reasons, only partially grounded in that "sacred" realm called Art, that provide an explanation.

First, whereas writing and painting are, almost exclusively, activities performed by individual artists in relative privacy, cinema and theatre production are, by virtue of their media, essentially collective activities carried out as a set of public exchanges. Put somewhat differently, writers and painters have extensive control over their means of production: pen and paper; brush, paint and canvas. They have the luxury (should they choose to utilize it) of "creating for the drawer": unpublishable manuscripts can be filed away, circulated in typescript, or read aloud at small gatherings of friends and guests; unexhibitible paintings can be stored, displayed in the apartment, or included in private showings.

By comparison, cinema and theatre production are socio-economically "marked" because the means of production (as well as the means of performance and distribution) are owned by the state: cameras, sound-booms, studios, editing equipment, prints, cinema-halls, etc.; stage and auditorium, costumes and props, lighting and sound equipment, etc. Again put somewhat differently, filmscripts are *not* films, playscripts are *not* plays. "Guerilla" theatre remains, unfortunately, only a minor exception to this rule.

While the collective nature of these two media does not preclude intense political disagreement and artistic rivalries between individuals, it is at the same time predicated on intense political and artistic allegiances and on organized working relations. These allegiances and working relations develop their own history and extend far beyond any immediate crew, project, or production. In fact, precisely these relations lie at the center of the organized dissatisfaction with the preceding union administration that exploded at the Fifth Congress of Cinematographers,<sup>17</sup> and with the absence of a comprehensive union administration that turned the Fifteenth Congress of the All-Russian Theatrical Society (VTO) into the First Congress of RSFSR Theatre Workers (October 1986).<sup>18</sup>

Second, even as the collective nature of artistic work in film and theatre production provides a proto-organizational structure for workers in these media, it simultaneously makes it infinitely easier for the cultural monitoring agencies to control the actual production and distribution of the artistic object. From beginning to end, the creative process in cinema and theatre production is determined by the need to accommodate already existing republic and local (*obkom*, *gorkom*, and *raikom*) policies. The possibility of future changes in these policies is a factor that cannot be accommodated by these two media because they are ruled by present policies once the transformation from text to performance gets under way.

The stagnation in Soviet culture during the last decade of the Brezhnev administration is nowhere better demonstrated than in cinema or theatre, more specifically by their absence

14 We hasten to add that the literary scene is not entirely without new talent. In addition to stories by Tolstaia, recent works by new or lesser known writers include the novellas *Anna Petrovna* by Gennadii Golovin (*Znamia*, II, 1987), *A Humble Cemetery* by Sergei Kaledin (*Novyi mir*, V, 1987) and *Captain Dikhshtein* by Mikhail Kuraev (*Novyi mir*, IX, 1987).

15 Roland Eggleston, "Moscow News Editor Gives Press Conference in Vienna," *Radio Liberty*, 487/87: 5.

16 *Framework* 34; "Soviet Cultural Politics and Cultural Production," *IREX Occasional Papers*, 1987.

17 *Priatyi s'ezd kinematografistov SSSR. SENOgraficheskii otchet*. (Moskva: Vsesoiuznoe biuro propagandy kinoiskusstva, 1987).

18 *Literaturnaia gazeta*, December 3, 1986.

in the international arena. While literature and painting developed an extensive network of unofficial (or counter-cultural) balances to the insufferable "artlessness" of official trends, the stranglehold over cinema and theatre production exercised by various control agencies effectively closed down these two media for foreign consumption and undercut domestic interest. This loss of audience can be attested by the overall decrease in film screening attendance (especially in the Russian Republic, where most films are produced each year) and the empty theatre halls outside of Moscow, as noted by Aleksandr Iakovlev in his Kaluga speech.<sup>19</sup> The critical situation that prevailed by the early 1980s provides an important insight into the bellicose and combative rhetoric of reformers during the congresses of the two unions.

Third, precisely because of the collective nature of artistic production and the stultifying controls over cinema and theatre, these two media never developed a parallel émigré tradition that jeopardized in any way the vested interests of either the old or the new guard. Again, the situation was (and remains) quite different for the individual arts: émigré literature and painting have a lengthy tradition that extends through all three "waves" of emigration. Individuals, not artistic collectives, can emigrate. This fact has precluded the possibility of creating an alternative to official, domestic cinema and theatre production.

Throughout this discussion, music remains the transitional moment between the dimension of "private enterprise" involved in the production of literature and painting, and that of "state enterprise" required of cinema and theatre production. The critical difference, however, lies in the fact that, as a non-verbal art, music is culturally "exportable" precisely because it is not linguistically bound. The implications of this fact escape neither the émigré musicians and composers, with a long tradition of accomplishments outside the Soviet Union, nor Soviet officials exporting to the West a wide range of works by official Union composers, from Tikhon Khrennikov to Rodion Shchedrin.

Paradoxically, the absence of an émigré tradition in cinema and theatre production has ensured that the struggle over the control of cultural production continues entirely within the corresponding union, that the search for alternative models continues to be an internal and national search. From this point of view, it is interesting to note that the posthumous "rehabilitation" of film director Tarkovskii and the "reintegration" into the official canon of the two films he made in the West — *Nostalgia* (1983) and *Sacrifice* — have occurred side-by-side with invitations to theatrical director Liubimov to request a visit home and the "reinstatement" of his productions at the Taganka Theatre.<sup>20</sup> Unlike other émigrés from cinema and theatre, who have either moved out of cinema and theatre or have fully integrated themselves into the corresponding Western industries — for example, film director Genrikh Gabai and cameraman Iasha Sklanskii — Tarkovskii and Liubimov posed a very real danger: the establishment of an émigré tradition.

## Settling Disputes: A New Mafia?

The turbulence occasioned along the entire cultural front by the Congress of the Union of Cinematographers in May 1986 resulted in several inevitable misperceptions: rapid developments were seen *ipso facto* as radical reforms; a change of administrative leadership was seen as the dissolution of a bureaucratic apparatus; and the establishment of a disputes commission to review Goskino bans on "shelved" films was seen as a major step in abolishing censorship mechanisms restricting artistic expression.

Recent history has provided ample evidence to justify this overly sanguine view of the Soviet film-making industry, and not surprisingly, scholars and citizens on both sides of the great divide continue to see the Cinematographers' Union as being in the vanguard of cultural reform. Clearly there are many accomplishments that must be credited.

"Recent" Soviet films have dominated international film festivals for the past two years, winning a disproportionate number of prizes after almost a quarter century of barely being represented. "Recent" in this case refers not only to films that have been recently completed, but also to the more than 120 films that have "recently" been released from the shelves of Goskino after a delay, in some cases, of two decades.

New Soviet films — that is, films that have been undertaken since May 1986 and therefore under the new mandate — have addressed topics that were unthinkable less than three years ago: problems of the youth counter-culture (Podnieks' *Is It Easy To Be Young?*); bureaucratic corruption in the Ministry of Culture (El'dar Riazanov's *Forgotten Melody for Flute*, 1987); the life- and soul-destroying abuses of Stalin and Stalinism (Aleksandr Proshkin's *The Cold Summer of 1953*, 1987); the inequities in the distribution of social goods and services and the hypocrisy of official political rhetoric (Nikolai Gubenko's *Forbidden Zone*, submitted to Goskino for approval in January 1988).

Several Western organizations have developed plans for co-productions, co-publications and scholarly exchanges. The quality of film scholarship, especially in the journal *Iskusstvo kino*, has improved markedly in the past two years. The entire film-making and film-distribution industries have begun to be overhauled and transferred to the self-financing experiment, with the attendant reorganization of studios, shooting crews, review commissions, etc.

Once appropriate credit has been granted the Union, however, certain disturbing features come into focus. Received wisdom stipulates that the "radicalism" of the Cinematographers' Union can be demonstrated first and foremost by the disputes commission established in May 1986 and its "success" in obtaining the release of films "shelved" by Goskino over the last several decades. Other Unions, most notably the Theatre Workers', have called for the creation of their own disputes commissions, but none has undertaken such a "radical" step.

At the risk of sounding iconoclastic, we question this notion of radicalism. The absence of a disputes commission in the Writers' Union has not prevented the publication of works

<sup>19</sup> *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, July 21, 1987.

<sup>20</sup> With the "re-premiere" of *Vladimir Vysotskii* on January 25, 1988, the new artistic director of the Taganka Theatre, Nikolai Gubenko (appointed in 1987), has managed to reinstate the entire "Liubimov repertoire." Liubimov himself has indicated that he will return to Moscow in May 1988 to stage the official premiere of *Boris Godunov* at the Taganka (David Remnick, "Lyubimov to Visit Soviet Union," *Washington Post*, April 4, 1988).

that have been held up for decades, nor has it impeded the rehabilitation and publication of writing by external (Nabokov, Ivanov, Zaitsev, etc.) and internal (Gumilev, Klychkov, Glazkov, etc.) émigrés. The absence of a disputes commission in the Composers' Union has not prevented the cautious introduction of rock and heavy-metal music into the realm of official culture, nor has it impeded the release of recordings by "rehabilitated" singers like Vadim Kozin or "underground" bards like Aleksandr Rozenbaum. The absence of a disputes commission in the Artists' Union did not prevent the two-part exhibition on Profsoiuznaia Street of paintings by artists who had emigrated, nor has it impeded the "rehabilitation" and reappraisal of Chagall, Kandinsky, and the Russian avant-garde of the turn of the century.

Clearly the cinematographers' disputes commission has accomplished much, but equally clearly the other unions have accomplished similar goals without a centralized disputes commission. Moreover, there are increasing indications that the disputes commission is not concerned with verifiable public accounting for the shelved contents of the cinema archives at Belye Stolby outside Moscow. The commission cannot be credited with the unshelving of Aleksandr Askol'dov's *Commissar*, and has not yet released any of Gabai's work.

What is disturbing is the fact that observers have placed such heavy emphasis on the mere existence of the commission — in effect, on a purely formal, bureaucratic element — and have credited it with routing the entrenched cultural conservatives in the film-making industry. Yet none of the procedures involved in "shelving" films has been reformulated. None of the officials responsible directly (Goskino) or indirectly (the former Union leadership) has been publicly named and made accountable.

What, then, if anything, demonstrates the "radicalism" of the Union of Cinematographers? During the past decade, it has become a commonplace to dismiss former First Secretary Lev Kulidzhanov, former Secretariat member Sergei Bondarchuk and others as an entrenched artistic mafia with a stranglehold over the Soviet film-making industry, as a band of political lackeys, self-serving functionaries and cultural dinosaurs. It is easy to forget that *thirty* years ago, when they broke into prominence in the world of Soviet film, they were hailed (correctly) as "revolutionary" film-makers when measured by the aesthetic norms and values that dominated Stalinist cinema, just as the new prominent figures (Klimov, Abdrashitov, Panfilov, Bykov, etc.) are today hailed (correctly) as "revolutionary" film-makers when measured by the dominant norms and values of Brezhnev cinema.

Let us close the circle we opened at the beginning of this article: Kulidzhanov's 1957 film *The House I Live In* (co-directed with Iakov Segel) introduced *iskrennost'* into Soviet cinema. The film's use of a mundane collective hero (the residents of a house) rather than the traditional heroic collective led by a superior being marked a radical transformation of characterization in Soviet film. It introduced the intimacy, diffuseness and concentration on the petty details of day-to-day survival so typical of Italian neorealism. This transformation, in turn, was instrumental in changing the entire scale and orientation of cinematic subjects: from the grandiose to the commonplace, from the epic to the intimate, from the historical to the present, from the romantic to the realistic.

In the same way, it is easy to forget that *twenty* years ago, when "Kulidzhanov, Bondarchuk & Co." took over the leadership of the Union of Cinematographers, they were seen (incorrectly) as the banner-guard for major cultural reform in the film-making industry, just as the new leadership (Klimov, Abdrashitov, Panfilov, Bykov, etc.) is seen (correctly or incorrectly) as the driving force behind contemporary cultural reform. Certainly by the mid-1960s Kulidzhanov's and Bondarchuk's films marked a distinct turning away from their achievements in the mid-1950s and back to the grandiose, epic, historical and romantic — Kulidzhanov's *Blue Notebook* (1964) and *Crime and Punishment* (1970), Bondarchuk's *War and Peace* (1964-67) and *Waterloo* (1970).

It is, however, merely a short distance from Bondarchuk's panoramic characterization and monumental scope to the panoramic scope and monumental characterization of Rasputin in Klimov's *Agony*, Daria in *Farewell* (1980) or Floria in *Come and See* (1986). All three films remain grandiose, epic, historical and romantic. We do not mean to deny the absence of aesthetic, formal, and thematic differences between the films of the old leadership and those of the new. Instead we want to stress the existence of specific historical and filmic continuums. Why? Because in the months since May 1986 another, more ominous pattern has begun to emerge, signalling the danger that one exclusionary bureaucratic apparatus has been displaced by another artistic mafia that is now in the process of entrenching itself.

A careful comparison of the new Secretariat of the Cinematographers' Union with a list of directors who have been granted virtually unlimited access to the West (visas, studios, companies, festivals, scholars and media) reveals considerable overlap. It is all too easy to confuse the struggle for cultural reform with the struggle for creaturely comforts, whether those are defined as access to a domestic audience and domestic goods or as access to multiple-exit visas and Western film and video technology. Looked at in this light, it is but a small step from *glasnost'* to "*grasp-nost'*."

## Two Ends of the Spectrum: Television and Individual Publishing

The centripetal nature of cultural reform in the year following the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress is weakening. We can no longer speak of either *glasnost'* or *perestroika* without designating a possessive modifier: whose *glasnost'*? whose *perestroika*? with what agenda and under whose mandate? As the jockeying for position in the cultural establishment becomes of greater importance than the impulse for reform, it is paradoxically the most tightly controlled arena of culture — television — that remains the most active in broaching controversial topics and lobbying for liberal reform. By comparison, *Ogonek*, the analogue in the hard-copy media, is, despite its mass nature, not characteristic of the overall state of news publication.

Herein lies the dialectical moment in present-day cultural politics. Television — with its sophisticated editing/censoring capabilities (rendering it inaccessible to the amateur and thus avoiding the risk of *samizdat*); its "freedom" from oppositional histories or émigré culture (thus avoiding the intrusion of *tamizdat* or publishing abroad); its production process founded

on public answerability rather than individual opinion; its potential for efficient mass distribution with minimum expenditure of either human or natural resources — is best able to retain and propagate the early liberal spirit of Gorbachev's reforms described at the outset of this paper (diversity of opinion, individual expression of opinion, breadth of permissible topics). This is the case precisely because it has ceded no actual administrative power to interest groups that would impede that liberalizing process. By providing unlimited access to the consumer/viewer while withholding technological access from the would-be distributor/broadcaster, television as a cultural outlet is vastly preferable as a medium for cautious, graduated reform, insofar as it involves minimal risk with maximum potential for influencing social change.

If television, as the most easily controlled medium, retains the greatest potential for liberal reform, then individual publishing, such as that unsuccessfully attempted by Iurii Efremov, Veniamin Kaverin, and others to establish the independent publishing collective "Vest," represents the least controllable and therefore the greatest threat to graduated, liberal reform. This is the case *even though* "Vest" itself is a liberal initiative. The Council of Ministers' refusal on October 23, 1987 to permit publishing collectives is only one indication that it perceives political power already to be dangerously eroded by individual claims both from the right (Pamiat') and the left (the Western-oriented group Perestroika Club). This refusal is based on the correct perception that publishing collectives would inevitably provide not only a literary but also a political forum for the New Right and the New Left.

The Council of Ministers' instructions on independent publishing does allow for a proliferation of vanity-press arrangements through Goskomizdat, the state committee for publishing and printing. This "vanity measure" does little to alleviate the backlog of manuscripts and in no way substantially alters the publishing process as a whole. It manages only to create the appearance of change, while ceding no administrative autonomy to individual enterprises.

But the implications of the Council's instructions go further still. Applied not only to publishing, but also to printing, video screening ventures, and "other cooperatives in the ideological sphere," to quote the order signed by Council chairman Nikolai Ryzhkov,<sup>21</sup> the instructions are consistent

with a broader tendency beginning in late 1987 to redirect cultural reform away from private individual initiatives (be they publishing enterprises, political discussion circles, rock clubs, or informal Russian Orthodox groups) and back into existing institutions (be they the Writers' Union, Goskomizdat, the Party, the youth league Komsomol, or the newly formed RSFSR Council on Religious Affairs).

The last of these institutions, responsible among other things for ensuring that religious believers comply with laws on religious associations,<sup>22</sup> provides an administrative body for dealing with the burgeoning youth interest in religion, without either involving the Komsomol or revising the Komsomol's long-standing ban on religious believers. Political groups, rock clubs and other interest groups potentially compatible with the Komsomol, on the other hand, would be incorporated insofar as possible into Komsomol activities, according to an internal draft of the Agitational and Propaganda Department of the Komsomol Central Committee.<sup>23</sup>

If this is indeed the governing tendency of the present moment, then two tendencies that will surely be played out in the ensuing months are, first, to separate out those newly emergent elements in each cultural grouping that are perceived by the Party as anti-Soviet; and, second, to reabsorb those elements perceived to be adaptable to the Party's own changing cultural agenda. The first of these tendencies may be incompatible with Gorbachev's original spirit of *glasnost*; the second may be incompatible with his liberal program of *perestroika*.

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21 Bill Keller, "Soviet Halts Independent Publishing Cooperatives," *New York Times*, February 3, 1988.

22 "APN on RSFSR Council on Religious Affairs" in "The USSR This Week," *Radio Liberty* 366/88: 4.

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